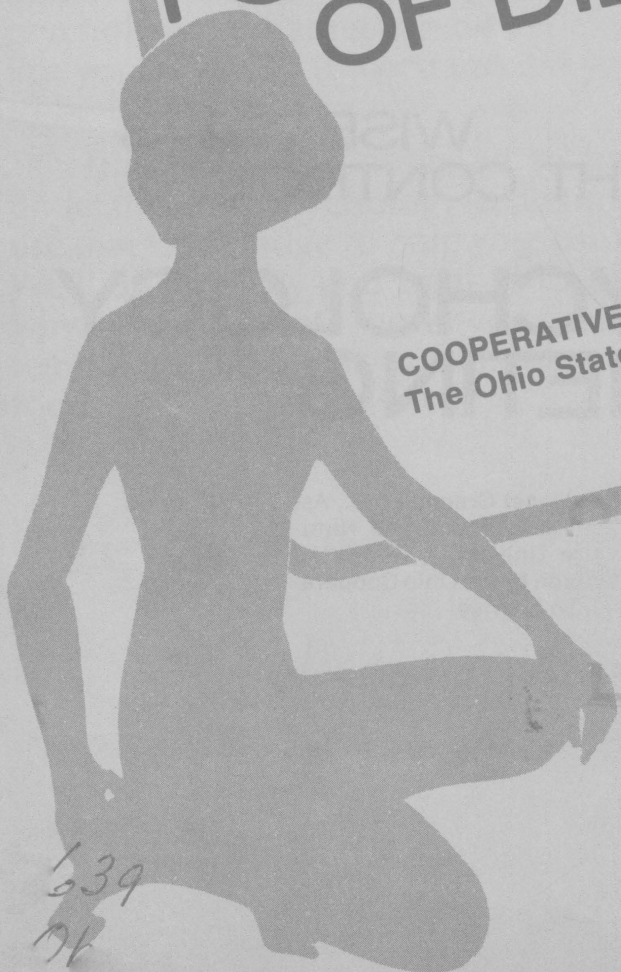


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Bulletin 617

WISE WAYS
TO WEIGHT CONTROL..
**PSYCHOLOGY
OF DIETING**

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
The Ohio State University



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WISE WAYS
TO WEIGHT CONTROL..

PSYCHOLOGY OF DIETING

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Not too many years ago, being overweight was a sign of success. But not today. Now it's stylish to be thin. If your weight problem is keeping you from being stylish — or keeping you unhappy — you may want to lose weight. Or do you? The psychology of dieting can be a tricky thing. But you've got to understand it if you want to be successful.

This booklet is designed to help you understand the psychology of dieting — and use that knowledge to help you lose weight. We'll discuss why you want to lose weight, why you overeat, how you can avoid temptation, and how to face the enemy — food.

Why Lose Weight?

Being stylish and happy are only two reasons for losing weight. There are other reasons for dieting — medical, economic, aesthetic, psychological, and social. What are your reasons? Don't answer too quickly. Take time to think. Is it because you want to fit into a size 9 dress for the party next month? Or is it because you enjoy the attention you get when you announce that you're on a diet again?

Or maybe you realize how unhealthy it is to carry around extra pounds. Obesity is associated with many serious diseases: heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, gall bladder disease, and certain kinds of arthritis. In addition, overweight people are more accident prone and greater surgical risks than slim people are.

Perhaps you are fed up with doors that seem to slam in your face. It's true that many positions in the business and social world are not open to the obese. And that's bound to damage your self respect.

Whatever your reason for wanting to lose weight, be honest about it. Your answer is an indication of how successful you will be at losing weight. Studies show that dieters who have long range goals such as better health and better general appearance are often successful in losing weight and keeping it off. But those who diet to meet short term goals, such as fitting into a smaller dress, are often disappointed in the results of their diet.

One well known nutritionist has said that short term dieters are practicing the "rhythm method of girth control." Because this type of dieting is ineffective and can harm your health, you should avoid it. Start a weight control program only if you're serious about losing weight and keeping it off.

To find out if you are really serious about losing weight, answer the following questions:

- _____ 1. Is it safe for me to lose weight? (Pregnant women and people with certain diseases are generally advised against dieting. It's always wise to check with your doctor.)
- _____ 2. Do I have a good reason for wanting to lose weight?

- _____ 3. Will I work seriously at it? (To test yourself, avoid known problem foods for several days, starting today. Park your car far from your destination and walk the rest of the way. And avoid eating while you're doing anything else.)
- _____ 4. Are my family and friends going to help or hinder my attempts? How do they react to the simple test above? Do they poke fun or encourage?

If you can answer these questions positively, your chances of success are good. But remember! It is *never* easy to lose weight and keep it off. But it is a possible goal.

Why Do You Overeat?

Picture your favorite food in your mind. Perhaps it's a slice of chocolate cake! Or a thick, juicy steak! Or a bowl of big, red strawberries! All these visual cues tend to arouse your appetite.

Now think of the smell of freshly baked bread or fresh coffee. These are cues, too. And realizing that it's only 30 minutes until lunch will sharpen your appetite, also.

Every day you are exposed to hundreds of sights, sounds, and smells, many of which sharpen your appetite. In fact, that's the problem: every day you're exposed to too many appetite cues. And so you overeat. Then your weight becomes your problem.

So let's talk about what psychologists and nutritionists have learned about eating behavior and why people respond differently to appetite cues. If you understand why you overeat and what prompts you to do it, it will be easier for you to control your eating.

Psychologists tell us that eating is a type of addictive behavior which provides an "immediate positive reinforcement." Simply, this means that eating gives you an immediate sense of pleasure. So you tend to repeat the act of eating more often than you repeat other activities and overeating becomes a habit.

Of course, there are rewards for dieting — a slim figure and better health, for example. But these occur only in the distant future. Most of us would rather do something that brings instant pleasure — like eat. After all, the negative effects of overeating are not felt immediately. Poundage accumulates so slowly that most people are not aware of it until bulges appear or until they try to squeeze into last year's swimsuit.

But you *can* overcome your urge to eat for immediate pleasure. You *can* diet for future rewards instead. How? The first step, of course, is to recognize what stimulates your appetite. Then do something about it.

Unlike an alcoholic, you can't stop the habit of overeating by avoiding the thing you're addicted to. You can't get away from all food. You have to eat.

But you can help solve your weight problem by learning to identify cues to your appetite. You see, the cues to hunger depend on both external and internal stimuli. We mentioned some earlier. The sight and smell of food and the time of day are external cues to your appetite. Your mood and your environment may also be cues to your appetite. A hunger pain and a growling stomach are internal cues — cues within your body. Researchers know that everyone reacts to these cues, but obese people are more sensitive than others to external cues to the appetite.

So the first step in your weight control program is to identify those cues in the environment that encourage you to overeat. That way, you can change your habits so the cues won't affect you — and you'll no longer need to eat to satisfy them. Research shows that when positive cues are removed, an obese person will often lose his appetite.

For instance, do you eat when you're bored or depressed? Or do you eat out of habit when you watch TV? Or maybe you eat when the children act up. Whatever your reason for overeating, identify it.

The easiest and most thorough way to do this is to analyze when you eat during the next week. Be honest! Do you eat dabs of leftovers when you clear the table? Put it down on your record. Do you sample the meal as you cook it? Record that, too.

Keep a record of *when* and *where* you eat, *what* you are *doing* at the time, and *how* you *felt*. Write down this information every time you eat for three days — even if you’ve only eaten a piece of candy. Then you can use this record to find what causes you to overeat. Because everyone’s reason for overeating is different, this record is an important step for every dieter. Your chart may look like this:

	When ?	What did I eat?	What was I doing?	What was my mood?
First Day	7:30	coffee & doughnut	breakfast - self	
	8:00	1/2 slice toast	make breakfast for children	hurried - shame to waste food
	9:00	2 doughnuts & coffee	cleaning up after children	dreading ironing - bored
	11:00	sandwich & milk	lunch	
	1:00	soda - pop	watching TV	so-so
	4:00-5:00	piece of chicken	making supper	hurried
	5:30	chicken casserole (lettuce, peas, salad)	supper	
	6:00	1/2 serving of peas	clean off table	shame to waste food
	7:00-10	soda pop & popcorn	watch TV & sew	so-so (bored)
Second Day			no breakfast	
	8:00	1/2 doughnut & 1/2 slice toast	make breakfast for children	shame to waste food
	9:00	1 piece of cake & coffee	neighborhood coffee	socialable

Lead Yourself from Temptation

When you’re faced with the temptation to eat, don’t. Ah, that’s easier said than done, isn’t it? You need some helps to keep you away from the refrigerator door when you shouldn’t be there.

And you can provide that help for yourself. Just take a hard look at the chart you’ve been keeping for three days. It can help you identify your external cues to eating. Once they are identified, avoid them.

Did any situation cause you to eat two or more times besides mealtime? For instance, does your chart show that you nibbled three or four times while you watched TV or cleared the table? Or did you eat when you were upset with your husband or children? All these things are external cues to hunger.

Now, it’s up to you to avoid the external hunger cues that seem to affect your appetite. You can avoid the cues by changing your behavior. Not all at once, of

course! Changing your response to appetite cues takes time.

Let's see how this works. Let's say that you discover that you eat out of habit while watching TV. You can change this behavior by making eating a "pure" experience. Make a rule that you will never eat except when seated at the kitchen or dining room table. If you develop an appetite while watching TV, you must stop watching TV and go to the table for your snack. And that's so inconvenient that it may dampen your appetite. Besides, after several months you'll probably find that you no longer connect eating with TV. This idea may sound silly to you, but many dieters have found it really works.

Or you may find that you're eating because you're bored. That's why many people eat. If this is your case, think of something you'd really like to do — then do it. Perhaps you'd like to take a course at the community college, learn to play tennis, or refinish furniture. Or, fill your hands with craftwork while you watch TV. Do anything that you like to do — besides cook. Stop making food and eating your most interesting activities.

If you eat because you're angry or frustrated, try to release your anger or frustration by chewing sugarless gum or by doing something constructive. Don't attack some defenseless food just because you're upset. If you do, you'll find yourself even more upset — about a weight problem. For example, if you're upset about a traffic problem, write your councilman. If the appliances keep breaking, let the manufacturers know. Or put your pent up feelings into a garden full of low calorie vegetables. But don't solve your problems by eating. That's no solution; that's a cover-up.

But, you say, I can't give up that food; I'm addicted to it. True, certain foods have addictive properties for many people. For instance, most people can't eat "just one" potato chip. If this is your problem, don't buy the foods that you're addicted to. That way, you ban these external cues to appetite from your house.

Of course, it's not easy to bypass the foods you love when you do your grocery shopping. After all, advertising gimmicks make these foods awfully tempting. But

it will be easier to bypass troublesome foods if you use these hints:

- Shop only from a list of Basic Four foods for balanced meals.
- Take along only enough money to pay for the foods on your list.
- Arrange to do your shopping after you eat a meal. Resistance to food is greater when your stomach isn't growling.

Another way to avoid the temptation of eating is to reward yourself for sticking to your diet. For example, for the next two weeks, try to do all your eating — even snacking — at the table. Each day that you succeed, give yourself two points as a reward. But each time you buy empty-calorie foods like candy and pastries, subtract five points. At the end of two weeks you deserve a reward if you have more than 20 points.

But be careful! Don't reward yourself with food. Make your treat a new haircut, going to a movie, or trying some new cosmetics for the "new" you.

To give you further incentive, make a "contract" with a friend or relative who also wants to lose weight. Promise each other that you will keep track of your points — and that the one with the fewer points will clean the other's floor or oven. That should give you real incentive!

Remember that everyone is different. So it's up to you to look at your own behavior and analyze what "makes" you overeat. Then, you can take positive steps to channel your interests and feelings into activities other than eating.

Facing the Enemy-Food

As we said before, you have to face food sometimes. Everyone has to eat to survive. But facing the enemy squarely is no easy task for a dieter. However, it can be done. Let's talk about ways you can control your eating behavior when you have to face the enemy.

The first step is to slow down as you eat. That way, you won't be able to cram as much food in your mouth during the mealtime. Naturally, a faster eater eats more

food than a slow eater in a given time span. It's no wonder that fast eaters are often overweight eaters!

Here are several tricks to help you slow down as you eat:

- Chew each mouthful thoroughly and slowly, paying close attention to the appearance and texture of the food.
- Cut your food into smaller pieces. Then eat just one bit at a time.
- Swallow each bite completely before putting more food on your fork or spoon.
- Plan short delays during meals by occasionally placing your fork or spoon on the plate for one to three minutes.
- Try using utensils to eat all foods. You can't eat a sandwich or french fries as rapidly if you must eat them with a knife and fork.

As you eat more slowly, you'll discover a fringe benefit: eating slowly makes you a more pleasant eating companion. When you're not shoveling food in as fast as it will go, you will have more time to be social.

But you have to face foods at other times, too — especially if you're a homemaker. Homemakers are faced with food when they prepare meals and clear the table. And sometimes the temptation seems too hard to bear.

If you have a habit of nibbling as you cook, you might try subtracting a point from your total score each time you sample your cooking. After all, you aren't sitting at the table when you cook, so any as-you-cook eating is illegal.

Or if you simply must nibble, you might try keeping a low calorie snack handy. Instead of licking the pudding spoon, grab for a carrot stick.

Your temptation to eat as you clear the table may be especially acute if you're one of those homemakers who can't stand to waste food. So, in the name of "all those hungry people in China" whom you mother told you about, you pop leftovers into your mouth instead of the garbage.

Don't do that! You don't prevent food waste by adding to your waist. If you're faced with small dabs of leftovers that no one else in your family will eat, throw them out. For, if you eat all those dabs, your waist will be the biggest waste of all!

Sometimes you may be faced with leftovers that are more than dabs. If this happens a lot, evaluate your cooking habits. Maybe you should cut your recipe in half — or whatever is required to allow one serving for each family member. Then you wouldn't be faced with the temptation and you'll save money.

But what if the leftovers are intentional? What if you like to prepare extra meat and vegetables to use in another dish tomorrow? In that case, prepare the dish immediately and refrigerate it. Aren't you more likely to nibble on a leftover chicken leg than on a casserole made of leftover chicken that's ready to be baked?

And, of course, you sometimes have to face food at parties. This can be a real downfall for party-going dieters. After all, party food is often temptingly delicious. And it's traditional to eat — or even overeat — at parties. Here are some hints to help you meet the challenge of limiting what you eat at a party.

- Sit or stand as far away from the food table as possible.
- If a tray of food is passed to you, pass it on immediately.
- Avoid second helpings — even at dinner parties.
- Choose low calorie foods.

Success is seldom easy! That's certainly true for weight watchers. Don't expect to change a lifetime of habits overnight. After you've kept a record of your eating habits, pick just one behavior pattern to change at first. Perhaps you will want to concentrate on slowing your pace of eating or perhaps your goal will be to learn to stop nibbling as you cook. Really work on that goal until your new eating pattern is automatic. Then tackle another eating problem. Although this approach to dieting won't help you fit into a size 9 dress for the party next week, it will help you to lose weight and **keep it off!**

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